

## George Richmond

W14989 1

Barred from the Fire House ostensibly because he is neither an “active” nor “honorary” member, but according to common report because he persistently occupied the only easy chair in the Hose Company quarters, George Richmond finds hospitality of late in a service station on Main Street. The action of the fire fighting fraternity, made plain to Mr. Richmond in the crudest possible fashion, has cut him to the quick, and he quite naturally seeks an audience to air his grievance. It is only after adroit conversational maneuvers that he is persuaded to change the subject to “Midnight” Peck, Yankee peddler extraordinary.

“Midnight Peck? A great old boy,” says Mr. Richmond. “I remember him comin' to the house. My father'd bought a wringer, or some such article, off'n him.

“We's all sittin' down to supper table, and we heard the knock on the door. ‘Who be that?’ says my father. Them days you didn't expect no company supper time. ‘Well,’ my mother says, ‘get up and see.’

“Who was it but Midnight. He was a long, lanky individual, looked's though he never got enough to eat. And I don't think he did, some days. He come in, and he says to my dad, he says, ‘I brought your wringer, Henry,’ or whatever 'twas he had. And all the time, he was kind of sniffin' the air, like a hungry dog. Supper was on the table, all steamin' hot, you see, we hadn't had a bite. Well, nobody said nothin', we all knew what he wanted, but my mother had 'bout all she could do to feed the family, without passin' it out to other people. Finally he see he wa'n't goin' to get no invitation, so he came right into the kitchen, took off his hat, and he says, ‘I know you folks won't mind if I set down and have a bite with you,’ he says, ‘I been on the road all day, and I got other calls to make yet, and I'm that hungry I could eat a boiled owl.’

## Library of Congress

"Well, what could you say? Besides he didn't wait for an answer, he just sat down and started eatin'. Didn't even ask if he was takin' anyones's chair.

2

My mother was boilin' mad, but she didn't say nothin'. My dad wasn't mad, but he was kind of annoyed, you might say.

"But he didn't say nothin' either, till after supper was all over. Midnight whaled into the grub, way he et you'da thought he had a hollow leg, and when he got through, he sat back and let out a big sigh. Full as he could be. My mother just set there, mad as a wet hen but not sayin, nothin', but my dad says, 'Now Mr. Peck,' he says, 'we don't want to seem impolite,' he says, 'but you see we wa'n't expectin' company tonight and we're a big family here,' he says, 'we wa'n't any too well prepared.'

" 'Next time you figger on comin', ' he says, 'if you'll only let us know in advance, Mrs. Richmond will have a couple of pies baked for the occasion.'

"My dad meant to be sarcastic, you see.

"And Midnight knew it, too, but he didn't let on.

" 'that's all right, Henry,' he says, 'I don't need pie to make a meal. I don't know when I've had a better supper.'

"My mother couldn't keep still no longer. She says, 'No, nor a cheaper one.'

"But that didn't [?] him, 'Now, now Mrs. Richmond,' he says, 'I got just the thing that'll please you. A fine new broom. Got a consignment comin' in in a couple of days, and I'll be sure to stop and leave one with you.' Then he grabbed his hat, 'Well,' he says, 'Got to be goin'. I got a couple of calls to make down Greystone way yet.'

## Library of Congress

"And it was close to half past seven then, mind you. That's why they called him Midnight.

"My mother says to my dad, she says, 'You hadn't oughta pay him for that wringer. 'twould serve the big blatherskite right. I'll never get that broom, you wait and see.'

3

"Did she get it? Oh, I don't remember. I just mentioned it to show you how he was. We lived over on Orchard street then. He had peculiar ways about him, but he wa'n't what you'd call hungry for money, either. There was a lot of money owed to him and his brother.

"That mill of theirs was a dandy. They had about everything you could think of in it. If you went in there and asked for somethin', they'd have to dig for it. That's what they did, dug for it. Had stuff piled up all over the place, they'd have to dig and root for whatever 'twas, first in one corner and then in another."

Says Mr. Davis, the station attendant, who has been an interested listener:

"Well, George, you can talk about the Pecks, but look at Billy Lyons. Look at the business he does. He's an undertaker. He sells new cars and used cars. He sells radios, dishes, tea, coffee, kitchen furniture, china, silver sets. He's got a bus line, he's got the school contract, for carryin' the kids back and forth. He runs taxi, or he used to. He sells washin' machines. Why my God, he's got it on the Pecks seven different ways."

Mr. Richmond: "Well, he's the modern, they were the old fashioned, that's all."

Mr. Davis: "And talk about peddlin' late. You remember when old Johnny Welton used to run the tea truck for him, around through the country? I went with him one time. They got a new Dodge, with one of them reverse shifts, and John couldn't get the hang of it, and I went along to drive for him. Why My God, he made more stops that day than Henry Peck made in two weeks. And every place he went he'd try to sell a set of dishes. We didn't get home till ten o'clock at night. He said it was just an average day."

## Library of Congress

Mr. Richmond: "Yes, I guess Lyons does quite a tea business out around the country. Well, I guess I'll get along over and see what Dan the tailor has to say. They don't want me up to the Fire House no more.

4

They needn't think they're foolin' anyone, with their talk about new rules. They just want to keep me out. What is it anyway, a Fire House, or a damn club? That's what I'd like to know. Town payin' taxes for sixty five loafers. Hang around there and use bad language. The place is gettin' a reputation for that. There's been complaints. Yessir, plenty of 'em. Why I could tell you————"